

A Profile of Horwich Lancashire, England

By Paul Lacey, 2003

Horwich is a town and civil parish within the Metropolitan Borough of Bolton, in Greater Manchester, England. It is 5.3 miles (8.5 km) southeast of Chorley, 5.8 miles (9.3 km) northwest of Bolton and 20 miles (32 km) northwest from the city of Manchester.

Historically a part of Lancashire, it lies at the southern edge of the West Pennine Moors with the M61 motorway close to the south and west, and Blackrod to the southwest. According to the United Kingdom Census 2001, Horwich has a population of 19,312.

Since 1997, it has been the base of Bolton Wanderers football club, who play at the Reebok Stadium in Horwich, having relocated from Burnden Park near Bolton town centre.

History

The name Horwich derives from the Old English *har wice*, meaning the "(place at) the grey wych-elm". The settlement was first documented in 1221 when the name was recorded as *Horewic*.

Horwich's origins began as a hunting chase in mediaeval times for the Barons of Manchester. Horwich continued as such until the 17th century, although the amount of woodland was reduced for house building and for fuel.

Early Non Conformists at Horwich Civil War Control

In 1669 numerous meetings of Nonconformists were reported at Horwich there was a 'conventicle,' but the ringleaders had been prosecuted. Among those whose estates were sequestered for 'delinquency' by the Parliament in the time of the Civil Wars was Philip Martindale of Horwich, chapman. A non conformist service is mentioned in 1672 within the house of Thomas Willoughby.

After the Civil war, with the connivance of the vicar, the chapel was used by Nonconformists, but in 1716 Bishop Gastrell recovered it for the Established Church, and it has since been retained. There was a chapel stock of £190, in the hands of Nonconforming trustees, who refused to pay the interest when the chapel was taken from them.

It was during this period that Richard Pilkington and his family were closely associated along with Hugh Whittle with the Horwich Parish Church, the place then being a non conformist place of Worship. New Chapel located between what is now Brazley and Chorley Old Road was the creation of Richard Pilkington and exists today as a protected building. The Holy Trinity was opened in 1831. A separate ecclesiastical district was assigned to it in 1853.

A large proportion of the population refused to conform at the Restoration, but nothing is known as to their ministers or organization, until, as stated above, the chapel at Horwich came into their hands about the Revolution. It can be fairly assumed the same occurred at Rivington. On being ejected in 1716 the Dissenters erected a meeting-house called the New Chapel, Horwich; this was

enlarged in 1805, and other alterations have been made more recently. A second Congregational church, known as Horwich Lee Chapel, was erected in 1856, replacing one built in 1774.

Pilkington's, Shaws and Lord Willoughby

The family of Baron Willoughby of Parham were Presbyterian and prior to the formation of the Chapel at Rivington in 1703 were greatly influential in exerting Presbyterian rights over the parish church of Horwich and also of Rivington Anglican Chapel. The Shaw family, who owned vast tracks of land at Horwich Rivington border and around Heath Charnock and Anglezarke were another Presbyterian family and had married into the family of Lord Willoughby of Parham. It is in Horwich in this period we find close associations between these two Presbyterian families and that of the Pilkington family of Horwich, again Presbyterian. Richard Pilkington had a long ancestral heritage at Horwich, this branch went on to form Pilkington Glass.

The Pilkington's of Horwich were originally farmers and moved upward to become gentry, Richard Pilkington held rights of the Horwich Manor during his lifetime. Great changes were under way in the 1770s as industry changed two brothers, John and Joseph Ridgway, influential and land agents to the Blundells moved their bleaching works from Bolton to Horwich Wallsuches. The Blundell family had acquired large tracks of freehold after the Anderton family had conflict with the crown after the battle of Preston in 1715. Today The Blundell Arms, Chorley Old Road, Horwich displays the Blundell family coat of arms above the door.

Pilkington's PLC

The Horwich branch of the Pilkington's who in the 1700s went from being farm owners to gentry later went to form Pilkington's PLC, now one of the largest companies in the world and a well known household name. The Pilkington's of Horwich, Rivington, Anglezarke and the surrounding areas all trace their roots back to Leonard Pilkington living 1066. The areas of land owned were once either held in fee simple subject to the goodwill of the King or in many other cases were held of the Knights Templar.

It is not known when Horwich's first chapel was built, but in 1565 the Commissioners for Removing Superstitious Ornaments took various idolatrous items from Horwich Chapel. This chapel was replaced with a larger one in 1782 to accommodate the increasing population. The second chapel itself was replaced with an even larger church in 1831, which is still standing. Until 1853 Horwich was a chapelry in the historic ecclesiastical parish of Deane, after that date Horwich became an ecclesiastical parish of its own right.

In the 17th and 18th centuries there were a number of non-conformists in Horwich. In 1719 they built their own "new chapel" and named so to distinguish Horwich's (Anglican) "old chapel". This building is still known today as New Chapel. In the 18th and 19th centuries other non-conformist churches and chapels were built in Horwich.

Horwich Works

In 1881 Horwich still had a small population with 3,761 inhabitants and around 900 houses, this hadn't changed much in the previous fifty years. Two major events led to rapid increased population and size of Horwich, firstly and without doubt the most significant in its time was the arrival of the Railway. In the next 10 years Horwich was transformed into a town of 12,850 people by 1891 followed by the arrival of W.T Taylor Cotton Mill.

In the spring of 1884 the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway (L&YR) started work to build a new large locomotive works in Horwich when the company's works at Miles Platting became too small. By November 1886 Horwich Locomotive Works became up and working when the first locomotives were taken in for repair. The first newly built locomotive (Number 1008) left the works in 1887. This locomotive is now preserved at the National Railway Museum.

In both the First and Second World Wars Horwich Works played an important part with the manufacture of tanks, munitions, etc.

The original company which owned Horwich Locomotive Works was amalgamated in the early 20th century with other railway companies until they were eventually nationalised in 1948 by the Transport Act 1947 and becoming British Railways. In 1962, British Railways transferred control of all its main works to a central body called British Railways Workshops Division, with its headquarters in Derby. In 1970 this Workshops Division was renamed British Rail Engineering Limited (BREL).

The last steam locomotive constructed at Horwich Works left on November 27, 1957 and the last diesel built there left on December 28, 1962. Horwich Works was reduced to repairing engines and finally maintaining railway wagons. On February 18, 1983 BREL announced that the works was to close at the end of the year. Protest marches and spirited trade union resistance failed to alter the decision and so at 1 pm on Friday, December 23, 1983 Horwich Works closed after 97 years. The freehold of vast land acquired for the railway works was transferred as property from British Rail to Bolton Council in the mid 1990's and today much of the new Middlebrook development sits on the old British Rail land. The arrival of Middlebrook and development of the retail park has transformed Horwich again increasing its population.[citation needed] Today Horwich roads cannot cope with the volumes of traffic trying to get in and out of the town.

Governance

The old Manor of Horwich was the property of the Andertons of Lostock Hall, Lostock, the crown confiscated lands in 1715 after the battle of Preston. These lands were later leased back to the Blundells. Horwich was once a township in the historic ecclesiastical parish of Deane, in the Hundred of Salford of Lancashire.

In 1837 Horwich joined with other townships (or civil parishes) in the area to form the Bolton Poor Law Union and took joint responsibility for the administration and funding of the Poor Law in that area.

In 1872 the Horwich Local Board of Health was established for the area of the township, and was superseded by the creation of Horwich Urban District of the administrative county of Lancashire in 1894. Under the Local Government Act 1972 Horwich Urban District was abolished in 1974 and its area became a successor parish of the newly created Metropolitan Borough of Bolton in Greater Manchester.

On the 9 January 1974 Horwich was granted a Town Charter by the Earl Marshal, which officially gave Horwich the status of a town, which included a town mayor and town council. On the 6 December 1974 the Earl Marshal also granted and assigned an official Coat of Arms for the town. Horwich had been using an unofficial Coat of Arms.

In March 1990 the towns of Horwich and Crowborough (East Sussex) entered into a unique and historic twinning arrangement when they became the first towns within the United Kingdom to sign a Town Twinning Charter. The charter was signed by the mayors of Horwich and Crowborough at a ceremony in the Public Hall, Horwich on the 22nd March 1990 and in the Town Hall, Crowborough on the 27th March 1990.